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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 002536

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: DCM, USAID DIRECTOR SURVEY IDP CAMP, URGE END OF
FIGHTING

REF: A. MANILA 2504 (PRESIDENT ARROYO LAUDS OBAMA
VICTORY IN MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR)
[1](#)B. MANILA 2488 (AMBASSADOR URGES RAPID RESOLUTION
TO MINDANAO MILITARY OPERATIONS)
[1](#)C. MANILA 2365 (PEACE PROCESS BATTERED BUT NOT
BURIED)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As part of our efforts to call attention to the plight of internally displaced peoples in Mindanao and encourage the government and Muslim insurgents to end fighting, the Deputy Chief of Mission and USAID Director traveled to the remote epicenter of the government-rebel conflict and site of the highest concentration of internally displaced persons in Mindanao. They were welcomed by local leaders and regional health officials, who expressed deep appreciation for long-standing U.S. health and education programs that are now focused on the needs of displaced peoples, as well as new U.S. assistance. The Acting Director for the World Food Programme was grateful to accompany them to the location, otherwise off-limits due to security concerns. In a subsequent meeting with the local Philippine military division commander, DCM and USAID Director discussed displaced peoples and encouraged an early end to the continued sporadic fighting. Local media covered the visit extensively, focusing on U.S. assistance to displaced peoples as well as the need for fighting to end and people to get back to their homes. We believe our carefully calibrated campaign to influence government and rebel leaders is gaining traction, without triggering a nationalist backlash in a highly sensitive political environment. The Ambassador drew on the visit in conversations with senior government officials (ref B), as did the DCM in quiet outreach to rebel leadership. END SUMMARY.

U.S. COMMITTED TO SUPPORT IDP RELIEF EFFORTS

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Deputy Chief of Mission, accompanied by USAID Mission Director and UN World Food Programme Philippines Acting Director visited a crowded internally displaced persons (IDP) evacuation center October 30 in the remote village of Datu Piang, Maguindanao province, to assess the conditions at the camp, demonstrate U.S. support for IDP relief efforts, and reinforce the importance of existing U.S.-Mindanao partnerships in the face of the current humanitarian disaster. With 41,000 evacuees, who fled fighting between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and rogue units of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), Datu Piang has the largest IDP population in Mindanao. During a welcome meeting, Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) Secretary of Health Tahir Sulaik commented that, even in this isolated village, in the middle of

Liguasan marsh and near the site of recent AFP-MILF skirmishes, U.S. assistance was having a positive impact on the IDP situation, and he thanked the DCM for our contributions. The Datu Piang health clinic, renovated as part of the USNS MERCY humanitarian visit in June, was now serving the needs of IDPs at all hours. The DCM affirmed U.S. support for the people of Mindanao, evidenced by our readiness to help the local and regional governments face this daunting crisis. With U.S. assistance in Mindanao already well-established, the DCM noted, we were well positioned to provide immediate aid as the IDP crisis unfolded, and were likewise poised to do more as the situation evolved, although the U.S. continued to encourage all parties to press for an end to the fighting.

ENCOURAGING THE MILITARY TO END THE FIGHTING

13. (C) In a meeting later in the day with AFP Sixth Infantry Division Commander General Raymundo Ferrer, the DCM described his visit to the crowded IDP centers and emphasized to Ferrer that, for the sake of reducing the impact on civilian populations, it was important that military operations end soon. The DCM suggested that the AFP could proactively transition to civil-military operations to assist local populations and encourage return of IDPs. General Ferrer agreed, said that such programs were ongoing, and asked if they could expect further U.S. assistance. Human rights groups, he lamented, criticized the AFP for excessive force and blocking relief supplies, but Ferrer said that AFP troops exercised restraint and that NGOs needed to coordinate more closely with local and regional officials to schedule aid

MANILA 00002536 002 OF 003

deliveries. The DCM thanked General Ferrer for supporting the Embassy's travel to Datu Piang, an area that in recent weeks had seen intense fighting. After the conclusion of the formal meeting, the DCM privately encouraged Ferrer to consider the negative consequences of the prolonged fighting as well as the enormous benefits of putting an end to it. Ferrer indicated his agreement, noting that the AFP had already achieved its military objectives.

NGOS CONCERNED ABOUT ONGOING CONFLICT

14. (SBU) At an earlier lunch hosted by the DCM with business, humanitarian, and pro-peace NGOs, participants expressed their hope for a lasting peace that would enable Mindanao to achieve its full economic and social potential. The DCM congratulated all present on their proactive responses to the IDP crisis and, given the United States' long-standing relationships with most of these groups, encouraged them to think of new ways to leverage our existing partnerships to respond to and ultimately put an end to the present conflict.

Business leaders from three different chambers of commerce representing Cotabato City and the Muslim community described their efforts to transform Mindanao into a major halal food production center for the Muslim world and to improve local governance and infrastructure, while NGOs that supported the government-MILF territorial agreement expressed their disappointment with the Supreme Court's October decision declaring that agreement unconstitutional. They asked the DCM to find ways for the U.S. to help end the fighting and bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Noting that the U.S. was already quietly engaged in that effort, the DCM encouraged all present to work together and to build on existing relationships and strengths to help bring us closer to that goal.

U.S. AID BRINGS RELIEF TO CROWDED, UNSANITARY CAMPS

15. (SBU) The visit to the Datu Piang evacuation center allowed the DCM and USAID Director to assess the conditions at the camp and view the impact of USAID projects on the

health and welfare of IDPs. Demonstrating one aspect of the U.S. response to poor sanitation, the DCM and USAID Director broke ground on a latrine structure in the town square, a project made possible by refocusing USAID health projects in Mindanao toward IDP relief. They also administered dozens of Vitamin A capsules to children at an adjacent makeshift health facility, another USAID sustainable health initiative which has distributed vitamins to 7,000 children and vaccinated 6,800 against measles. Other long-term USAID projects have supported local governments' health infrastructure and the development of potable water sources, which together have helped local governments have a more effective response to the current IDP influx. The well-established USAID presence in Maguindanao enabled the U.S. to act quickly and effectively with government partners in the early days of the crisis, for which Secretary Sulaik and Datu Piang officials were clearly appreciative.

16. (SBU) Local and regional officials cited numerous challenges in dealing with IDPs, such as the increasing number and mobility of IDPs, inadequate and congested evacuation centers, depleted or inconsistent provision of medical supplies, inadequate sanitation, and exposure to illness. In Datu Piang, the leading causes of morbidity were diarrhea, pneumonia, typhoid, and measles, with seven deaths since August 21. Measles continued to be a problem at other evacuation centers in Mindanao. Working closely with local partners, U.S. projects will continue to take into account these key health concerns and other challenges, directing U.S. assistance to make the greatest impact possible.

17. (SBU) The UN World Food Programme (WFP) Philippines Acting Director Alghassim Wurie accompanied the DCM and USAID Director on the visit to Datu Piang to view conditions at the camp, a site that WFP officials were previously unable to view first-hand without special security measures due to fighting in the area. WFP has delivered food to Mindanao IDPs in two rotations since August, primarily rice but also dates, oil, and high energy biscuits, totaling 3,100 metric tons. Datu Piang has received 359 metric tons, or about 12 percent of all WFP food aid to Mindanao. Wurie explained that WFP's key concerns were the potential for a cycle of displacement, outbreak of disease in camps, and the food security of those who farmed and fished for a living. The U.S. contribution in October of 1,480 tons of rice through

MANILA 00002536 003 OF 003

USAID/Food for Peace had not yet been delivered, Wurie noted. However, given that WFP rice stocks were expected to run out in December, WFP was reviewing the possibility of borrowing against the U.S. contribution.

COMMENT

18. (C) The visit to Maguindanao province achieved three primary goals: surveying the IDP evacuation center conditions, assessing the impact of U.S. relief assistance, and continuing our strategy to encourage the AFP and the rebels to end the fighting and help people return to their homes. We were also able to confirm that local leaders seek further U.S. assistance, which insulates us from Manila political figures who questioned whether a sudden commitment of EU assistance had been properly requested. The visit to the remote, conflict-affected town of Datu Piang demonstrated for local officials and the press the unbending U.S. support for Mindanao and its people. As a follow-up to the visit, the DCM spoke by telephone with MILF Vice Chairman Ghazali Jafaar, seeking to focus him on the plight of IDPs and the need for MILF leaders to help find ways to stop the fighting. The MILF, Jafaar noted, was considering an offer of "suspension of military activities." While a firm commitment to stop fighting has yet to take shape on either side, it is clear that our sustained dialogue with both sides has led them to search more proactively for an expedient political context and vocabulary with which to close the chapter on the

latest fighting.

KENNEY